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This disposition gave Fuaz twofold satisfaction. It would facilitate the execution of his plan to recover his mare by stratagem and confirmed his assumption that the Saba did not reckon with the possibility of a Ruala raid so soon, as very little rain had fallen in that region and travel therefore was still very difficult. They probably thought that the Ruala would not venture so far into the inner Hamad until much later, when water and pasture would be plentiful. It was clear at all events that, for the time being, Falha's keepers felt themselves quite secure. Furthermore, if a skirmish proved unavoidable, the fighting would be away from the Saba tents, for Bedouins of noble lineage consider it barbarous to engage the enemy near their own camp. They believe that only the Turks, the "Franks" (Europeans) and the rulers of agricultural Arabia wage war in such a way as to endanger the women and children.

Luck favoured Fuaz's designs from beginning to end. We broke camp early in the morning and a few hours later circled round the pasture where the Saba horses were. Then we wheeled and got between them and the camp. The whole movement was made smoothly and without contact with our opponents. But now their outposts sighted our troop and sought to evade us and carry word to the camp. Our camel-riders easily caught the fugitives, who stopped when a few shots were fired over their heads and let themselves be taken without attempting any defence. They were mere boys, fourteen to sixteen years of age. In rough jest, their captors cut off some of their long plaits and with these bound them

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721 522 hand and foot. This was a terrible indignity to such proud lads, who set great store by their six or eight "horns", as the Arabs call these tresses.

721. 233 It was nearly midday when we reached the depression in which the horses were grazing. It was a lovely scene, the sky was blue, the brilliant spring sun warm and pleasant, and the air was filled with the sweet smell of the fresh herbage. The horses and camels ranged about, browsing quietly. The sleepy herders were totally unaware of our presence until our camel-riders suddenly appeared over the lip of the depression. Then they awoke to a realization of what was happening. I was rather loath to disturb their *dolce far niente;* above all was I sorry for the Saba horses, which were to be so suddenly driven from their delectable pasture.

The mares raised their heads inquisitively as the herders, rudely awakened from their siesta, sprang to their feet and yelled warnings one to the other. A few of them were successful in loosening the woollen shackles of their horses, and, leaping on their backs, made their escape. They were but a handful, however, and of these two or three were eventually captured.

The horses of the Saba became restive as the Ruala horsemen galloped about them, but, shackled by the forelegs, they could only hobble round helplessly.

721 [231] At last our people cut out some twenty horses, including Falha, the brown mare of our search. Falha was shackled with iron links instead of the usual woollen ropes. Amir Fuaz had brought with him a couple of files in anticipation of such an eventuality. His delight on seeing Falha again was obvious; she was worth more

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"And therefore thou would'st have back the mother of thy foals?"

"Not because of that, but because it is a shame that thou shouldst steal the *wool*-shackled mares from our pastures."

"Did I not honourably warn you?"

"We trusted thy word, which only referred to Falha, and therefore we shackled her with *steel;* all the other mares had only *woollen* shackles."

Amir Fuaz looked thoughtfully into the distance and, as was his habit, toyed with his hair-plaits. Then, twisting one of the locks round his index finger, he stared the young Saba straight in the eyes.

"Thou art daring. But thou speakest the truth and I am not offended. Now I understand why Falha alone wore iron shackles. Therefore I will reward thy trust. Falha is our booty; take back what belongs to thee."

The Prince ordered his men to dismount from the captured mares and return them to the Saba. He also commanded Mnahi to take the plaits cut from the heads of the young Saba from his saddlebag, into which he had stuffed them as souvenirs, and throw them away.

●522 As Fuaz noticed me sitting peacefully and satisfied on Falha, he burst out laughing and cried:

"Allah Karim!—God is benevolent! Look at Aziz. First he comes on a raid against us, then we capture him, and now he rides home on our best mare."

Ali, my gallant protector, who stood near, took up the joke:

"Amir Fuaz will permit me to say that one must

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watch Aziz carefully, or he may flee to your enemies with Falha."

"Allah give him strength," said Fuaz. "He rides with the panthers and the falcons!"

"With the lions!" was Ali's improvement.

Despite their show of cheerfulness, I could see that it went hard with the Ruala tribesmen to watch the Saba ride off with the captured mares. But no one uttered a word of complaint against the magnanimous gesture of the chief, for generosity is held to be the highest virtue amongst the Bedouins.

So we started on our long ride to the home camp, and eleven days later rested again under the hospitable roof of Nuri Sha'lan's dwelling.